



## Unity and Diversity within Pidginized Arabic as Produced by Asian Migrant Workers in the Arabian Gulf

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### Abstract

Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) is a simplified contact variety of language spoken in the Gulf States in the Middle East. This unique linguistic phenomenon has resulted from the frequent language contact between the non-indigenous workforce with no Arabic skills, who come from countries such as India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines for job opportunities, and native speakers who do not share a common language with them. Pidgin languages have not been studied until relatively recently, since the middle of the last century. Similarly, GPA has received relatively little attention in the literature apart from a few descriptive works such as Albakrawi, 2013; Alghamdi, 2014; Almoaily, 2008, 2012; Alshammari, 2010; Al-Zubeiry, 2015; Avram, 2014, 2015; Gomaa, 2007; Hobrom, 1996; Næss, 2008; Smart, 1990; Wiswal, 2002. This study aims to propose an account of both unity and diversity within Asian migrant Arabic pidgins in the states of the Arabian Gulf in terms of a set of parameters where purely linguistic developments interact with contextual ones. The analysis of the social situation and of the available linguistic data shows that the main factor behind conventionalizing within GPA is migrants' mobility in the Gulf region. This is basically compatible with Bizri (2014)<sup>1</sup> who suggests that in Asian Migrant Arabic Pidgins (AMAP) "[...] mobility across the region is the major factor for homogenizing both native Arabic-speakers' foreigner talk and migrants' pidgin Arabic" (p. 385). One of the recommendations at the end of the study is that Saudi government should offer some courses for the foreign laborers to help them become familiar with basic Arabic words.

**Keywords:** *Phenomena of Language contact, Gulf pidgin Arabic, Gulf Arabic Language, Second language acquisition, Substrate influence, Arabic foreigner talk, Asian migrants in the Gulf*

### Introduction

Following the October 1973 "oil boom," the Arab Gulf States (GCC)<sup>2</sup> have experienced radical social, political and demographic changes in a very short time. This led to an extremely rapid increase in the demand for foreign labor, as the Gulf national workforces at that time

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<sup>1</sup> She conducted a comparative study on AMAP by grouping all the varieties attested from the Gulf area and from Lebanon.

<sup>2</sup> Gulf Cooperation Council, this includes: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman

were too small and without the required skills to execute huge projects. Hence, during the “oil decade” bonanza (1973-1982), the number of foreign laborers in the Gulf countries, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, rapidly increased, amounting to almost 4.4 million in 1985, a more than three-fold increase within a single decade. According to a Saudi report “Migration Information Source” more than seven million immigrants from Asian countries work in Saudi Arabia (Albakrawi, 2012). Also, the kingdom is the biggest economy in the Arab world, endowed with the world’s second largest proven oil reserves. This makes Saudi Arabia a major hub for population movements (De Bel-Air, 2014). Saudi Arabia as stated by Avram (2013b) has a multilingual setting as are all Gulf countries; Gulf Arabic (GA) is a form of Colloquial Arabic language spoken by the indigenous people of the Gulf Region (see Map 1 in Appendix A). Migrant workers, who come from various linguistic backgrounds and usually do not speak Arabic, come in to contact with GA speakers as well as speakers of other Arabic dialects, and there is an urgent need for communication between these two groups “Arabic-speaking locals and expats on one hand and non-Arabic speaking expats on the other” (Almoaily, 2012, p. 1).

Thus, a simplified form of Arabic has developed as a result of this contact which is known as ‘Gulf Pidgin Arabic’ (henceforth GPA). GPA is a reduced system of language that is used for communication between foreign workers and the native speakers of Arabic. Indeed, GPA and GA are two distinct forms of language, with lexical, phonological, syntactical, and morphological differences. It is worth noting here that, in addition to the indigenous vernacular GA, many other languages, language varieties, and registers are known by these workers and play a role in determining the characteristics of GAP. This situation has resulted in the emergence of various pidginized forms of Arabic across the Arab world, mainly in the Gulf area. The reasons why Asian expatriates working under the same conditions throughout the Gulf States have apparently developed dissimilar pidgins are still to be determined (Bizri, 2014). Recent research has yielded linguistic data on particular Asian varieties of Arabic which, upon examination, report many common features as well as some differences. Throughout the paper, the varieties under study are referred to as ‘pidgins’ both because they show processes of pidginization, and because they are recognized by native Arabic speakers as having a norm different from that of any other variety of Arabic. The migrants’ native languages are referred to as ‘substrates’ language.

This paper examines the presence of this unique linguistic phenomenon called GPA. All the grouped varieties of GPA in this paper are attested from the Gulf area and propose to



account for both unity and diversity between them in terms of a set of parameters, where purely linguistic factors interact with the social context which the migrants and employers navigate. This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 is an outline of the sociolinguistic situation in the Arab Gulf focusing on the factors (both linguistic and sociolinguistic) that are taken to be responsible for unity and diversity across the varieties. Section 3 discusses definitions of contact languages and their general features. Section 4 presents the corpus and the methodology. Section 5 draws a linguistic comparison of GPA varieties in the area of phonology where interactive processes and strategies are operating. Section 6 describes the analysis of the collected data and discussion. Section 7 provides some final conclusions and suggestions for future studies on GPA.

Despite the major advances in the field of pidgins and creoles over the past fifty years, there is still a need for more research non-Indo European input languages. For instance, many non-European lexifier contact languages, especially pidgins, remain under-researched and even the number of the available studies is still less compared to the European language-based pidgins and creoles (Almoaily, 2012). This could be due to the lack of research and documentation of non-Indo European language-based contact languages. In fact, there is a high possibility that a large number of worldwide pidgins and creoles are undiscovered yet (Almoaily, 2012). This in turn calls for more extensive documentation and analysis of pidgins and creoles, particularly the non-Indo European input language such as, Arabic, Chinese, or Indonesian. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding pidgin genesis and emergence when pidgin tends to arise in situations where there is a lack of interpersonal integration (i.e. extensive social contact) between the two groups in contact (i.e. locals and immigrants) (Bakker, 2008). Also aims at examining how aspects of the geography and economy of the Gulf region shape the variety of Arabic known as Gulf Arabic and, more recently, also Gulf Pidgin Arabic. From a linguistic perspective, I will tackle one of the most important aspects in the linguistic dimension of GPA, phonology. To date, there is no comparative study across Asian migrant Arabic pidgins in the Gulf region, and as far as I know, only Bizri's (2014) in the Middle East as a whole. It will thus be interesting to examine the role of the above aspects in the structures of GPA across the Gulf area.

### **Sociolinguistic situation**

The situation in which GPA was developed is a textbook case of the situations that create pidginized variety. Sakoda and Siegel (2003) write:

Nowadays, the term “pidgin” has a different meaning in the field of linguistics. It refers to a new language that develops in a situation where speakers of different languages need to communicate but don’t share a common language. (p. 1).

According to their definition, the situation in the Gulf States is ideal for the birth of a new contact language as discussed in the introduction. This section will shed light on the geography and economy of the region which are considered of primary importance when discussing the linguistic situation in the Gulf Region (Almoaily, 2008).

### **Geography and Demographics of the Region**

The Arab Gulf States are located in the centre of the Old World<sup>3</sup>. The geographical location of the Arabian Gulf is considered a transit hub for trade ships carrying goods between Asia, Africa, and Europe. As a result, most of the indigenous people who have been already living near the coast or moved to live where they were in frequent contact with sailors from various nationalities and linguistic backgrounds, which might possibly explain the large number of loan words in GA from the languages spoken in nearby countries like Persian, Turkish, and Urdu (Almoaily, 2012).

The demographics of the region have witnessed radical changes and developments since the middle of the 20th century (Feghali, 2004). These changes could have had a significant role in shaping the linguistic scene in the Gulf, especially the arrival of Asian workers from: Pakistan, Bangladesh, India ...etc., who began to arrive in the Gulf States in large numbers. For example, Foulkes and Docherty (2007) demonstrated several social parameters that could also greatly influence linguistic change, namely geographical area, social class and social network, age, sex and gender, race and ethnicity which, for instance, are frequently used in phonological variation studies. In the region of Saudi Arabia, for example, there are 9.7 million foreigners compared to 20.3 million locals according to the 2013 CDSI<sup>4</sup>. The geographical proximity of South Asian countries to the Gulf states make it easier to bring Asian workers, as this region had closer historical links with some parts of Asia than with many, more geographically distant, parts of the Arab world (Kapiszewski, 2006). Besides

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<sup>3</sup> Some geographers use the term *Old World* to refer to Asia, Africa, and Europe (see Mundy, Butchart, and Ledger 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Kingdom’s Central Department of Statistics and Information. Retrieved 01 Aug. 2016 from <http://www.data.gov.sa/dataset/saudi-non-saudi-population/resource/668ffa2a-f536-4e76-9014-05287ddc0df5>

geographical proximity, there are several reasons that explain the large number of Asian immigrants in the Arabian Gulf. Firstly, Asian foreign workers were less expensive to employ, easier to lay-off, and believed to be more efficient, manageable, and obedient (Girgis, 2002, p. 29). Secondly, Asian governments facilitate their workers' smooth flow to the Gulf and became more involved in their recruitment and placement. They were able to fully satisfy the needs of the Gulf employers. Thirdly, the willingness of the people to take low-prestige jobs with low income specially jobs where citizens in Gulf countries do not want and do not accept to work in socially low status and low income such as shopkeepers, barbers, tailors, laundry workers, bakers, etc.

Due to the steady presence of a large number of immigrant workers from various linguistic backgrounds, the situation in the Gulf area has been ideal for the crystallization of pidginized Arabic language in the region. Demography and economy have played a role in the linguistic development of GA and the emergence of GPA. The next section discusses this issue in more detail.

### **Economic Factors and Language Contact**

As I have argued above, the recent massive increase of jobs in the Gulf, after the discovery of oil in the region, and lack of opportunities to make money in the countries the migrants are coming from have influenced the GA and has led to the emergence of GPA. Abdeljawad and Abdeljawad (2013) stated that "within the same community, different groups of people go through various, economic, political and cultural processes resulting in competing patterns which may lead to inconsistencies in the application of variation" (P. 10). According to Feghali (2004), GA varieties in Saudi Arabia have been influenced by such prosperity. As a matter of fact, large groups of Saudi citizens who have moved to live in Riyadh and to the Eastern Province have promoted cultural diversity and interaction between the dialects of the region, the dialects of Arab workers in Saudi Arabia, and the languages of non-Arabs (Almoaily, 2012). Over time, this frequent interaction had an influence on GA, leading to the levelling of the GA varieties at various linguistic levels: the phonology and the morpho-syntax which also leads in turn to the emergence of these unique linguistic phenomena called GPA.

The demand for foreign workers in the Gulf countries at the beginning of the 2000s – after the high oil prices – allowed for a further rapid development of several Gulf states and in consequence a large growth in population, the foreign one in particular. The reality has

greatly exceeded the earlier predictions<sup>5</sup>. Due to such a huge number of expatriates, the Saudi government sets immigration regulations and policies for foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, as stated in the website of the Passports Agency of Saudi Arabia (<http://www.gdp.gov.sa> retrieved 10 Aug 2016). It is very important to understand the *kafeel* system in Saudi Arabia (a sponsorship system used to monitor migrant laborers, working mostly in the construction and domestic sectors, in Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) if someone is planning to come to this country. All workers need permission from their sponsor to enter to Saudi Arabia, leave the country on a permanent or temporary basis, and many other things. Every expatriate must have an *Iqama* (residence permit) for two years.

Some immigrant workers and employers violate these immigration policies such as by entering the country illegally or with a visitor permit and finding work. Others run their own business and pay a monthly/ annual sum to their 'fake employers'. Such violations could have contributed to the emergence of GPA, since pidgins tend to arise in situations where there is a lack of interpersonal integration (i.e. extensive social contact) between the two groups in contact (i.e. locals and immigrants), as described by (Bakker, 2008, and Almoaily, 2012).

Moreover, there is another factor that may play a major role in the emergence of new pidgins, which is linguistic simplification. Due to the linguistic complexity of the GA phonology as well as its morpho-syntax, most GPA speakers replace the most typologically less common phonemes in GA such as pharyngeal phonemes /ʕ/ and/ ħ/ and the fricative voiceless velar phoneme, /χ/ with more typologically common phonemes. Indeed, the GPA phonetic inventory does not include these sounds, which have been replaced with the vowel /a/, with /h/, and with /k/ respectively (refer to Almoaily, 2008, 2012; Naess, 2008; Smart, 1990, for a full inventory of GPA and GA phonemes).

Apart from the factors mentioned above, it is worthy to note that the strategies of language contact constantly followed by the foreign workers could create a sustainable language that has its new simplified and reduced system.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Girgis (2002) widely cited in the literature on the subject, predicted in the year 2000, that by the year 2010 the demand for expatriates in the GCC states would increase to 10,799,000. That number was already reached in 2002.



### **Pidgins and Creoles, Definitions and General Features**

In the past not much emphasis was put on pidgins and creoles despite the fact that “language contact seems likely to be nearly as old as language itself” (Holm 1988, p.13). This might be due to the fact that pidgins in the past were considered to be broken, low-status varieties of language that do not deserve formal study (Almoaily, 2008). For the last century – late 1950s and early 1960s – the study of pidgin and creole languages has become a very productive field of general linguistics and this because of how they challenge various theories of language and gives information about interesting characteristics (Özüorçun, 2014). Pidgin and creole languages also raise questions about what they might tell us about the interaction of language and the mind and the process of language acquisition (Velupillai, 2015). Thus, many linguists are tempted to use the terms *pidgins* and *creoles* for any case of language contact, language mixing or language acquisition (Miller, 2002).

In the next section I will try to give a simple definition for pidgin and creole regardless the diverging views in defining these two contact languages.

### **The Definition of Pidgins and Creoles**

The definition of pidgin and creole is still an elusive one due to lacking of consensus in defining and distinguishing between them. For three decades a large body of literature on this topic has been written and the criteria used for the definition and the emergence of pidgins and creoles have evolved. This situation might appear quite confusing for non-specialists as (Miller, 2002) referred to. She added that specialists are more reluctant to classify pidgin and creole languages as a typologically discrete class. One of the most important views in defining pidgins and creoles was based on a set of linguistic and of non-linguistic criteria (historical context of emergence, type of contact, processes of acquisition, etc.). As pointed out by Winford (1997), “the identification of pidgins and creoles is based on a variety of often conflicting criteria including function, historical origins and development, formal characteristics, or a combination of these” (p. 1). But in many instances there is no clear-cut definition between pidgins and creoles. Only, few concepts that all authors agree on when defining pidgin are the necessity of *no shared language* among the groups considered and the concept of simplification. Yet, when describing concepts included into the definition of creoles we come across the problem of no fully shared concepts among the authors.





Simply, when people start to learn a language quickly and without being explicitly taught, they begin to develop a pidgin version of that language; then, if they need to use this pidgin on an everyday basis, it becomes a real language, called a creole. Creoles are language beginning again in a manner—immediately they divide into dialects, mix with different languages, and begin building up the decorations that older languages have (McWhorter, 2004). For concise definition of what pidgins are, see, for example, Bakker, 2008; McWhorter, 2001, 2004; Mühlhäusler, 1997; Parkvall and Bakker, (2013). I will not detail the endless debate concerning the definition and categorization of pidgin and creole languages but just give one simple definition for both pidgin and creole for the purpose of this study. Pidgin is defined by Velupillai (2015) as “a language that emerges when groups of people are in close and repeated contact, and need to communicate with each other but have no language in common” (p. 15). McWhorter (2001, 2004) is also defined pidgins as the languages that result from maximal contact and adult language learning and their speakers are using them as “transitory tools” for passing exchanging. If people used this simplified version of language, pidgin, as an everyday language, a pidgin can become a real language, a creole. McWhorter (2001) stated that creoles evolve as the complexification of pidgins resulting from the habitual use by children learning it as their native tongue. He has also provided a good detailed discussion on the difference between pidgins and creoles and semi-creoles is that pidgin is not a real language while creole is. Semi-creoles are languages that are poised between dialect and creole. For example, some creoles are poised directly between a European language and true creoleness, neither exactly dialects of the European language nor languages like Tok Pisin. 3.2 Characteristics of Pidgins

In this section I briefly list some of the common features which have been reported across pidgin and creole languages. I will concentrate on the level of phonology as this linguistic level is the focus of this paper. Please note that the focus will be on pidgin languages; creole features will be discussed in less detail since GPA has been classified as a pidgin by the majority of researchers such as Almoaily, 2008, 2012; Naess 2008, Smart 1990. Compiling a list of the phonological features of these two forms of language contact was not a straightforward process for two reasons. First, pidgins and creoles seem hard to tease apart. Second, the discrepancies in the literature as regards the classification of certain contact varieties whether pidgins or creoles, as discussed above.

There are some characteristics that distinguish pidgins from other *normal languages*. For example, McMahon (1994) claims that the consonant inventory in pidgins is usually reduced.



Similarly, vowels are usually fewer than their lexifier counterparts, and length distinction is lost. Holm (1988) and Baker (1995) suggested that phonological universals could have played a significant role in the pidginization and creolisation process. For instance, phonemes found in the majority of the world's languages like /t/, /d/, and /m/ are more easily transferred into pidgins and creoles than less common phonemes such as /θ/, /v/, and /ð/. Moreover, Bakker (1995) states that there are some phonemes which would be expected to be simplified by replacing them with more common phonemes. For example, the Arabic typologically marked phonemes /ħ/ and /ʿ/ are highly expected to be replaced with more common ones specifically when these phonemes are not available in the substrate languages of GPA speakers which is further discussed in section 5.2. Similarly, Huber (1999) found that Akan speakers of Ghanaian Pidgin English replace the phoneme /v/ with /b/ or /f/ due to the absence of /v/ in the Akan inventory.

The next section demonstrates the methodology which I followed in order to find out the similarities and differences within Asian migrant Arabic pidgins in the states of the Arab Gulf.

### **Corpus and Methodology**

This paper is based on the examination of speech varieties recorded in various countries of the Gulf area. These varieties developed due to the regular contact between native Arabic speakers/ employers of the Gulf area and Asian migrant workers, where the majority of those immigrant workers mainly come from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) but also, to a lesser extent, from Southeast Asia (Indonesia and the Philippines). Once they arrive, they normally have no knowledge of any other language except their own, in which they have only a basic education (some are illiterate). Some of them occupy subordinate job positions, such as cleaners, housemaids, sales clerks and janitors. Those temporary Asian workers begin to acquire Arabic language skills in an informal situation, and in an urgent manner, either with native Arabic speakers or with their co-workers. Their stay in the Gulf region is, by law, always temporary, as I have discussed in section B (Economy).

The available corpus of GPA speech has been collected in different ways and for different purposes, and consists of three types of linguistic material: (i) Foreigner Talk material (FT)

collected from the media, <sup>6</sup> (ii) data elicited for descriptive purposes, <sup>7</sup> (iii) spontaneous interactive data which are either published as a whole, <sup>8</sup> or cited only in illustration of a linguistic analysis, i.e. taken out of their interactive context. <sup>9</sup> All the varieties reported from the Gulf area have emerged in a multilingual environment where several substrate languages are involved, from both South Asia (Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Sinhala, Malayalam, and Tamil), and South East Asia (mainly Tagalog, and Javanese). Though examining the published data in the Gulf area, I have noticed a variety of suggested names given to the pidgin varieties both by natives (employers) and by linguists. Smart (1990, p. 83), who provides the pioneering report on GPA, calls the language variety he gathered from UAE, Qatar, and Oman's media 'Gulf Pidgin' (GP); Twelve years after Smart's (1990) paper, Wiswall (2002) also refers to the variety spoken by migrants who live in Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia as Gulf Pidgin (GP); Næss, (2008: 9) and Bakir, (2010, p. 201) call their varieties collected respectively from Oman and Qatar as 'Gulf Pidgin Arabic' (GPA); Al-Moaily (2008) has chosen the term 'Urdu Pidgin Arabic' (UPA) while he calls this linguistic phenomenon 'Gulf Pidgin Arabic' (GPA) in his thesis (2012) both studies being conducted in Saudi Arabia; Al-Azraqi (2010) prefers to call the variety she documented 'Gulf Asian Pidgin' (GAP), but she mentions that most Saudis refer to it as *kalām hnūd* meaning 'Indian Talk'; Alshammari (2010) and Albakrawi (2013) use the term Saudi Pidgin Arabic (SAP) to refer to their documented varieties collected in Saudi Arabia while Al-Zubeiry (2015) chooses to refer to GPA as Saudi pidginized Arabic (SPA). Generally, the varieties of GPA considered are Kuwaiti Pidgin Arabic (KPA), Omani Pidgin Arabic (OPA), Qatari Pidgin Arabic (QPA), and Saudi Pidgin Arabic (SPA). In the literature, these are frequently lumped together under the name of 'Gulf Pidgin Arabic' as I discussed above (see e.g. Albakrawi,

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<sup>6</sup> Smart (1990) presents jocular printed material selected from newspapers published in the UAE, Qatar, and Oman between the years 1986 and 1987; half of the material presented in Al-Azraqi, (2010) is drawn from native Arabic speakers' authored TV scripts in Saudi Arabic; and Avram (2012) cites online sources consisting of humorous poems and songs written by native Arabic speakers, as well as chats among migrant workers in Oman.

<sup>7</sup> Wiswall (2002) compares FT and migrant talk in Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, through elicited translations (from Urdu/Hindi to Arabic in the case of 'Indian' migrants, and from Gulf Arabic into Gulf Pidgin Arabic in the case of native Arabic speakers); Al-Azraqi, (2010) distinguishes between media-retrieved data and data elicited from migrant workers in Saudi Arabia through interviews.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Moaily (2008) in Saudi Arabia presents lengthy interviews conducted by the author with migrant workers; Salem (2013) in Kuwait, also presents interviews conducted with forty Asian workers.

<sup>9</sup> Næss (2008) presents interactions recorded in Oman between herself speaking in Levantine Arabic and Asian migrants. However, the author's own interactions do not appear in the script; Bakir (2010) presents utterances extracted from inter-migrant conversations recorded in Qatar.

2012; Almoaily, 2013; Avram, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Bakir, 2010; Næss, 2008; Smart, 1990; Wiswall, 2002).

The importance of the way that the linguistic material has been collected (whether focusing on migrants' speech or on native Arabic-speakers' FT, elicited or spontaneous speech, or monologues or conversations) and published (whether the profile of the author of each utterance is specified or not, whether the interactive context from which each utterance is extracted is presented or not, etc.) for each of the above-mentioned varieties has significant implications for any comparative work. However, two important insights as regards the examination of the material are as follows:

First, native Arabic speakers' FT (the tendency of native speakers to simplify their speech when speaking to non-natives) has different characteristics from migrant Arabic speech, although the two systems are in constant interaction (Biziri, 2014b). This fact is observed in Smart's (1990) report as "the native speaker who may possibly modify his normal pronunciation in order to ease intelligibility" (p. 86). Wiswall (2002) also reports "[t]hese foreigner talk forms have become such a common and popularized feature of Arabic media that Native Arabs generally accept that this is the authentic way Indian workers talk" (p. 18). Thus, indigenous Arabs use this register when speaking with foreign workers. For example, in the transcript of a Kuwaiti popular social comedy TV series "Souq Al-Muqasis", Arabic actors imitate Indian workers by using forms of GP such as 'fi' في and the possessive 'mal' مال. However, both reports indicate that native GA speakers use more of linguistic features of GPA than the migrant Arabic speakers. Second, the amount and nature of input which GPA speakers receive during their stay in the Gulf will possibly influence their use of GPA. Asian migrants' speech can be distinguished into two different categories within GPA: 'live-in' migrants' speech, and 'freelancer' migrant speech, a fact observed in Wiswall (2002) and Bizri (2004-2014)<sup>10</sup>. The difference between the two terms is defined by Bizri (2014) as that 'live-in migrants' (mostly female maids) live with a local family (on two year contracts) who mostly use GA when communicating with them, but have very limited access to interactions outside of the employers' community, while 'freelancers' (mostly male drivers, barbers, bakers, shopkeepers, tailors, etc.) live on their own in rented rooms, work by the hour/week/month/year with several employers and are, therefore, exposed to different inputs and a more varied experience of Arabic. One distinguishing thing to point out is that

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<sup>10</sup> Wiswall (2002) distinguishes between 'house workers' speech' and 'non-house workers' speech'.

the social situation in Saudi Arabia is different compared with other Gulf countries where females are allowed to drive. This is one of the main jobs that a female (whether a local or a foreigner) cannot occupy in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, it is hard to affirm with certainty which target the speakers are situating to (whether it is GA or GPA). In general, however, the target language in each case appears to be different.

The majority of the available data from the Gulf relates to the freelancer category since the society in Saudi Arabia is gender-segregated and it is difficult for a male researcher to conduct face to face interviews with female workers and vice versa. This indeed calls for more female researchers on GPA female speakers in Saudi Arabia which help researchers investigate and classify this contact variety. Only a few studies contain housemaids' speech in their data, including Næss (2008) and Al-Azraqi (2010). However, the material published across the Gulf countries show similarities in housemaids' speech. For instance, the Arabic phoneme /ħ/ in /ħammām/ (bathroom) is always replaced in GPA with phoneme /h/ / hammām /. GPA seems to pattern in line with the phonological universals suggested by Holm (1988) and Baker (1995); phonological universals could have played a role in pidgins and creole phonology. Similarly, freelance workers' speech shows some phonological universals such as the less common phoneme /θ/ (dental fricative) found in Arabic is replaced with /t/. For example, the Arabic word /θəlæθəh/ (three) is pronounced /təlætəh/, as will be described further in Section 3.

This makes the traditionally adopted geographical distinction between GPA varieties of little analytical interest. Thus, the study of the above-mentioned varieties will focus on some of these 'environmental' factors<sup>11</sup>. In order to examine similarities and differences between varieties, as well as intra speaker variation, a set of parameters should be proposed in terms of where the purely linguistic developments<sup>12</sup> interact with contextual ones<sup>13</sup>. Some developments might be represented regarding one or more of these factors.

### **Factors functioning in phonology**

A number of studies have discussed the linguistic features of GPA with reference to its syntactic and morpho-syntactic structures. However, only a few studies have investigated

<sup>11</sup> Biziri (2014b) refers to them as the migrants' history of employment in the Gulf States, the conditions of their employment, and the exact nature of the TL presented to them

<sup>12</sup> Simplification processes, substratal influence, superstratal impact ( Biziri, 2014b).

<sup>13</sup> Native Arabic speakers' accommodation to what is perceived as migrants' speech (FT); SLA strategies and processes; the nature of the TL migrants are exposed to (Biziri, 2014b).

this variety at the level of phonology. Therefore, this section aims to explore the phonetic variation within GPA spoken by Asian migrant workers in the Gulf countries based on the published data. However, the available data are currently lacking for prosody and the organization of the vocalic system as Biziri (2014) claims, “it difficult to undertake a completely precise examination of the strategies deployed in the area of phonology” (p.390). For example, the transcriptions of Smart (1990) are heavily based on newspaper articles written by Arabic speakers in GPA, Næss (2008) also shows awareness of two issues: first, she is not a speaker of Gulf Arabic herself which could have affected the quality of her data and could have made her informants code-switch to English more often than the norm “[as] a non-native speaker of Levantine Arabic, initially unfamiliar with the Gulf Arabic dialect, my speech might have influenced my consultants” (p. 10). Second, “most of my field recordings are made in my consultants’ work” (p. 30) meaning that the acoustic environment was not optimal for rendering perfect phonetic recordings. Almoaily (2008) presents his corpus in an improvised transcription in Arabic script where vowels are not systematically marked.

As I discussed above, the official language of the Gulf countries is Arabic. GA is one language with many varieties in the Gulf. GA includes the dialects of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and UAE. Differences among these dialects, however, are minimal; linguistic differences are mainly found at the phonological and lexical levels and dialectal variation also exists from one area to another (Al-Salman, 2013). Smart (1990) mentioned in his report that “[A]GP exists in slightly varying forms along the Arabian seaboard from Kuwait to Oman, and also inland in Saudi Arabia itself” (p.83). The phonology of GPA differs considerably, in several respects, from that of Gulf Arabic. But first I will discuss the phonological inventory of GA, focusing on the similarities and differences among GA dialects.

## **Phonology in Gulf Arabic**

### ***Consonants***

Gulf Arabic has a consonantal inventory which varies from country to country, with a total of 29 distinctive units on functional and phonetic grounds. These consonantal phonemes are tabulated in Table 1 accordingly to the place, manner and voicing (standard IPA symbols are in brackets).



Table 1. *GA Consonants*

		Labial	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	Voiceless	b[b] ب		t[t] ت			k[k] ك	q[q] ق		ʔ[ʔ] ء
	Voiced			d[d] د			g[g]			
	Emphatic		ḍ[ḍ] ظ	ṭ[ṭ] ط						
Fricative	Voiceless	f[f] ف	θ[θ] ث	s[s] س	ʃ[ʃ] ش		ħ,χ[X]	ħ,χ[X]	ħ[h] ح	h[h] ه
	Voiced		ð[ð] ذ	z[z] ز			ġ[ġ]	ġ[ġ]	ʕ[ʕ]	
	Emphatic			ṣ[ṣ] ص						
Affricate	Voiceless				č[č]					
	Voiced				ǰ, [ǰ]					
Liquid				l[l] ل r[r] ر						
Nasal		m[m]		n[n] ن						
Glide		w[w] و				y[j] ي				

### Consonant Alternation

Speakers of Gulf Arabic use the phonemes in Table 1 in spoken Arabic but not in the written form, particularly phonemes like: / tʃ / and / g /. However, phonological variation among Gulf dialects does exist. Most Arabian Gulf speakers except those of Najdi Arabic, the form of Arabic spoken in the centre of Saudi Arabia, tend to alter Modern Arabic (MA) consonants when speaking GA. Examples<sup>14</sup> are as follows:

	<u>MA</u>	<u>GA</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
(1)	/k/ /kalb/	/tʃ/ / tʃalb/	dog
(2)	/ dʒ / / madʒlis/	/ j / / majlis /	sitting room
(3)	/ɣ/ /ɣasal /	/q/ /qasal/	He washed

<sup>14</sup> All of these examples are taken from (Jabbari, 2013).



- [illegible]

#### 5.1.1.3. Three-way variation between /q/, /dʒ/ and /g/

In some words, a three-way variation between the above-mentioned consonants is possible. The phoneme /q/ is used for both / dʒ / and / g / by some speakers in Gulf countries including the dialects of the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, while remains as it is in Oman.

- (5) /qadi:m/                      /qadi:m/                      old, ancient  
   /ɖɜadi:m/  
   /qadi:m/

## Vowels

As for the vowel system of Gulf Arabic, there are 6 vowels (3 short and 3 long) and 2 diphthongs whose distinctive function and length differences are closely associated with certain phonological contexts (see Table 2) below. Vowel length is phonemic in GA (Næss, 2008)

Table 2. *The vowel system of Gulf Arabic. The character   stands for any consonant*

		Front	Central	Back
High	Short	i [i] ِ		u[u] ُ
	Long	ī[i:] ِي		ū[u:] ُو
Mid		iy [e:] ِي		uw [o:] ُو
Low	Short		a [a] َ	
	Long		ā [a:] َا	

## Phonology of GPA

The consonantal system which is adopted by Asian migrants (Table 1) seems to be consistent within GPA, independently of the differences in the phonologies of the respective

Gulf Arabic dialects that may have served as a target language (TL) for Asian migrants in different parts of the Gulf.

Table 3. *Consonantal phonemes of GPA in linguistic symbols*

	Labial	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d			k g			ʔ
Fricative	f		s z	ʃ ʒ					h
Affricate				ʧ ʤ					
Liquid			l r						
Nasal	m		n						
Glide	w				y				

The inventory of consonants undergoes a significant reduction from GA to GPA given that the typologically marked phonemes of Arabic, such as /ħ/ and /ʕ/ are either replaced or lost due to the absence of these phonemes in their inventory (Almoaily, 2008, p. 36-37; Avram, 2014, p.15; Næss, 2008, p. 30-43; Salem, 2013, p. 106-107). Thus, in order to depict the similarities and differences within GPA, I will highlight the changes in the inventory of GPA consonants.

### **Stops**

The stops produced by all Asian migrants in the data in GPA are /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, and /ʔ/. Stops are the only consonants that exist in the phoneme inventory of all languages (Ladefoged and Ian, 1996, p.47), and hence it is not surprising that these sounds could have been added to the GPA inventory as a case of substrate influence as these sounds are pronounced easily by speakers of various substrate languages (Sinhala, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, etc.). In addition, Holm (1988) suggested that substrate influence is very common in the phonology of creole languages. Moreover, GPA seems to show a pattern in line with the phonological universals suggested by Baker, (1995) and Holm, (1988), that

universals play a role in pidgin and creole phonology. Common phonemes in many languages like /t/ or /d/ are preserved and pronounced in pidgins and creoles whereas less common phonemes like /θ/ and /ð/ rarely occur in pidgins and creoles (Almoaily, 2008). In some syllable final positions, the voiceless velar stop /k/ has been used by GPA speakers in words that have /q/ in Standard Arabic, like in the rendering of the GA word *ṭalāg* 'divorce' and *ṣadīg* 'friend', as *talāk* and *sadīk* (Al-Azraqi, (2010, p.169) and Smart, (1990, p.89).

(6) alhīn fi **talāk**

now TAM divorce

I'm divorced now

(Næss, 2008)

Næss (2008) mentioned that the use of the voiceless velar stop in word-final position in words where Gulf Arabic has the voiced stop is also noted by Smart (1990, p. 89) and the development of a /k/ pronunciation of this phoneme is attested in one of the Gulf dialect, Bahraini. In other Gulf dialects, Qatari for instance, there are documented trends of devoicing, final /d/ and /j/ (Johnstone, 1967, p.35) and a /č/ pronunciation of the Standard Arabic /q/ in Abu Dhabi, so the influence of an undocumented dialect form is one possible explanation for this phenomenon.

In Gulf Arabic, the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ is rare. It occurs mainly in GPA as a variant of /f/ (Næss, 2008). Moreover, the glottal stop /ʔ/ is rare in GPA. It occurs most often as a replacement for /ʔ/ as in the rendering of the word *sitta* 'as' "sixteen" in example 7:

(7) walad **sittata'as** sana, wāhid kabīr

son sixteen year one big

My son is sixteen years old, [that's] the older one

(Næss, 2008)

### **Fricatives**

Arabic fricatives (i.e. labiodental /f/, dental /s/ and /z/, pharyngealized alveolar /ṣ/ and /ḏ/, alveo-palatal /š/, velar /ḡ/ and /ġ/, pharyngeal /ħ/ and /ʕ/, and glottal /h/) are common in most GA countries except the affricate consonant /č/ which is not pronounced in Najdi Arabic.

### *Labiodental fricative*

The Arabic labiodental fricative /f/ is often realized as the unvoiced labial stop /p/ (a sound which does not exist in Arabic) by many speakers (Sinhala, Tagalog, Javanese, or Chavacano-speaking migrants) even if this sound is not found in their phonological inventory<sup>15</sup>.

- (8) mhn, sēn, bas ana ma **araf** bādēn **keyp** hāda  
 Ok good but 1SG NEG know after how DEM  
 Very well, but I can't vouch for how it will turn out (Næss, 2008)

### *Interdental fricatives*

GPA speakers almost always replace the GA interdentals /θ/ and /ð/ with dentals /t/ and /d/ as shown in the examples below:

- (9) ey dukān **tāni**  
 Yes shop other  
 Yes, [in] another shop (Næss, 2008)

- (10) 'ana ma fī ma'lūm **hada** kalām  
 I neg. par. known this talk.  
 I do not know this talk (i.e. language) (Al-Azraqi, 2010)

- (11) bas siyāra masbūt, **nadīf**, zēn yimši ey makān  
 But car ok clean good go any place

"But the car is OK, clean, good enough to go anywhere" (alternatively "goes anywhere without problems i.e. *zēn* as an adverb "well".  
 (Næss, 2008)

<sup>15</sup> These two sounds /f/ and /p/ become allophones, occurring freely within the same statement (Næss, 2008: 32).





### *Dental fricatives*

Most GPA speakers with different mother tongues replace the alveo-palatal /š/ with /s/.

(12) **sūp** tabīb zeyn aksan

See doctor good better

It's better to see the doctor (Næss, 2008)

The voiced dental fricative /z/ is devoiced in the speech of many migrants as cited by both Næss, (2008) and Al-Azraqi, (2010) e.g. *sēn* “good” for GA *zēn*.

### *Velar fricatives*

The Arabic velar fricatives in GA /ğ/ and /ħ/ are replaced by their velar stops to /g/ and /k/, respectively or by /k/ for both in GPA. For example, *yistokol* and *sogol* for *yštiğal* and *sħugħul* ‘work’ and *dāke* for *dāħil* ‘inside’ and *kalas* for *ħalas* ‘finished’ both are cited by (Næss, (2008) and Salem, (2013). Also, sometimes the GPA speakers substitute the pharyngeal fricative /ħ/ with the glottal approximant /h/ (e.g. *halas* for *ħalas*, Salem, (2013) and /ğ/ to /h/ (e.g. *sahīr* for *şağīr* ‘little’, Næss, (2008).

### *Pharyngeal fricative*

The Arabic pharyngeal fricatives /ʕ/ is replaced by /ʔ/ or, more often, dropped (whether in initial, medial, or final positions) (Bizri, 2014). For example, the Gulf Arabic passive participle *maʕlūm* “known” is altered to GPA *mālūm* by a lengthening of the vowel /a/ immediately before /ʕ/ (Næss, 2008). In initial and final positions, the sound /ʕ/ is dropped or replaced by /ʔ/ (e.g. GPA *arabi* < GA *ʕarabī* “Arabic”; *šāra* < GA *šāriʕ* “street”; *maʕāš* < GA *maʕāš* “salary”).

### *Glottal fricative*

The glottal fricative /h/ in Gulf Arabic is replaced by the unvoiced pharyngeal fricative /ħ/ in GPA as in *ħārr* for *har* ‘hot’ (Næss, 2008) and *ħilu* for *hilu* ‘beautiful’<sup>16</sup>. Also, there is a

<sup>16</sup> This is my own observation since I am a native Arabic speaker by myself; I am in a regular contact with GPA speakers.



"How many years have you been here?"

- (17) minni dāhel umān gul "kēf hālek" yirūh imārāt wa gul  
 čayf hālek  
 Here in Oman say "kēf hālek" go Emirates and say  
 "čayf hālek" (Næss, 2008)

Moreover, the affricate sound /j/ exists in all varieties of GPA, but frequently alternates with the Gulf pronunciation of /y/. For example, the word *wājid* "a lot" is pronounced as *wāyid* in most of the surrounding Gulf dialects except the ones in Saudi Arabia and Oman, *wājid* and *wāgid* respectively.

In the example below, the GA words al- ḥalīj "the Gulf" and yiji "come" are alternated with the settled Omani /g/ pronunciation:

- (18) al-kalīg yigi minni šugl bas  
 the-Gulf come here work only  
 "I only came to the Gulf for work". (Næss, 2008)

### ***Nasals, Tap and Approximants***

The Gulf Arabic nasals /m, n/, the tap /r/ and the semivowels or glides /w/ and /y/ and lateral approximant /l/ are preserved in all the material of GPA (Næss, 2008). However, the labiodental approximant /ʋ/ occurs in the speech of some informants in Næss's material as a variation of the bilabial approximant (semivowel) /w/. She referred to the occurrence of this feature due to the influence of the substrate languages of the speakers; Urdu, Sinhala, Malayalam and Tamil, which all contain a /ʋ/, but not a /w/ phoneme. For example, an Urdu speaker pronounces the Gulf Arabic word *wēn* "where":

- (19) aleyh sākin vēn Buraimi?  
 now live where Buraimi  
 "Where in Buraimi do you stay?" (Næss, 2008)



### 5.2.5 Vowels

All vowels in GPA are preserved and the vowel length seems to be not phonemic. GPA speakers seem not to differentiate between long and short vowels. The lack of length distinction in GPA is also attested in Næss's material. The GA word *gāl* "to say" is used by the same speaker in the following examples:

- (20) **gul** hāda kūb, hāda milāga  
 Say DEM cup DEM spoon  
 "She said: 'This is a cup, and this is a spoon'."

- (21) baba **gūl** lēš inte kīda hādi  
 Father say why 2SG DEM DEM

"My father said: 'Why do you do this?'"

(Næss, 2008)

The whole phonological system is restructured according to the phonotactics of the speakers' native languages, substratal influence (intra- and inter-speaker variation) or to simplification processes (Bizri, 2014). Inter-speaker variation is correlated with the migrants' respective native languages (e.g. Sinhala native speakers vs. Urdu native speakers). Avram, (2014) examined the variation between short /a/ and long /a:/, short /i/ and long /i:/, and /e/ respectively, as illustrated in the following examples<sup>17</sup>:

- (22) a. Tagalog, SPA  
*baden* 'then' (Online, 2009)  
 b. Tagalog, SPA  
*badin* 'then' (Online, 2008)  
 c. (Sinhala, 2 years), QPA

<sup>17</sup> Online sources: internet discussion lists (involving participants with different first languages, not including Arabic), songs, poems which are collected from 25 websites (Avram, 2014).



*bá den* 'then'

(Bakir, 2010, p. 209)

d. (Urdu, 5 years), OPA

*bá dé n* 'then'

(Næss, 2008, p.91)

Also, inter-speaker variation affects consonants. The word-initial consonants in the forms below are all reflexes of Arabic /z/:

(23)

a. *jén* 'good' (Javanese, 4 years), OPA (Næss, 2008: 34)

b. *sén* 'good' (Sinhala, 5 years), OPA (Næss, 2008: 34)

c. *zén* 'good' (Malayalam, 7 years), OPA (Næss, 2008: 33)

Intra-speaker variation occurs when a phonemic distinction in Arabic does not exist in the migrant's native language, resulting in both phonemes being freely used within the same phonological context. The following examples illustrate that intra-speaker variation in long vowels is variably realized as short or long, sometimes in one and the same word:

(24) Bengali, SPA

a. *fi* 'COP', *katir* 'a lot' (Online, 2009)

b. *badeen* 'then', *fii* 'COP', *kabeer* 'big' (Online, 2009)

(25) Tagalog, SPA

a. *salam* 'peace', *tamam* 'alright' (Online, 2006)

b. *kabeer* 'big' (Online, 2006)

(26) Urdu, SPA

a. *mafi* 'NEG COP', *zalan* 'angry' (Online, 2012)

b. *fee* 'COP', *jaded* 'new' (Online, 2012)

Intra-speaker variation is also attested in Aram's, (2014) corpus.



(26) Tagalog, SPA

*nafar ~ napar* 'person'

(Online, 2010)

(27) (Javanese, 4 years), OPA

*sén ~ jén* 'good'

(Næss, 2008: 32 and 34)

### General discussion

The picture that results from this account is quite clear as far as the pidgin status of GPA is concerned. However, in spite of the variation which is noticeable in the unstable variety of GPA, a certain degree of conventionalization norms are observable, as described by Bizri (2005) and Bakir (2010).

In phonology, the basic GPA phonetic inventory is reduced (as mentioned in section 5), where the 29 consonant Gulf Arabic phonemes have been reduced to 18, two of which sometimes merge with /s/, namely /z/ and /š/. In addition, the distinction between short and long vowels appears to have been neutralized, and this leaves GPA with five vowels compared to the eight vowels of Gulf Arabic (Næss, 2008). In all varieties of GPA, velar stops are the replacements of Arabic velar fricatives, pharyngealization is lost, geminations are lacking and the devoicing of final voiced consonants is common. Tosco and Stefano, (2013, p. 499) mentioned that these features are also shared with the African Arabic-based pidgins and creoles.

Differences in phonology are limited in GPA varieties as suggested by Bizri, (20014).

Dissimilarities are either due to substratal differences (arising from a range of South Asian languages) or superstratal (i.e. Gulf Arabic) impact on the phonology system of GPA or to differences in the FT strategies (strategies of accommodation of the native Arabic speakers) that the migrants interact with. Regarding substratal influence on one hand, I have noted throughout the material of Næss (2008), Almoaily (2008) and Bizri (2014) that the fricative voiceless /f/ is repeatedly realized as /p/ by speakers who do not have /f/ in their native language inventories, such as Sinhala, Tagalog, Javanese, and Chavacano, and on the other hand, the variety of GA that the migrants are exposed to (e.g. realizations in GPA of GA /k/ and /j/ as /č/ and /y/ respectively by migrants who have been to the Gulf, whereas /k/ and /j/ are preserved by migrants who have only been to Saudi Arabia).

Another factor which might be behind this conventionalization as highlighted by Bizri (2014, p. 405) is the distinctive wish to maintain a clear-cut distance between the groups of speakers (local employers and migrant workers), resulting in a kind of 'linguistic barrier' that produces non-intimacy between them, and positions the migrant workers in a lower linguistic status. This situation is identified by Næss (2008) as a 'social gap' where it is impossible for most migrant workers to ever cross into the 'category of Arab'. The dominant group does not want to admit the speakers of the non-dominant groups fully into their language community. In this case, they might utilize very simple registers when addressing members of the out-group leaving them to mimic this form of language rather than being exposed to a full-fledged variety of their language (Næss, 2008). However, the non-dominant groups may also reject cultural integration with dominant groups, while they still in need to communicate with them for economic reasons. As a result, it is possible that they feel that they are unvalued and lose their desire to learn a full-fledged language. This lack of motivation for perfecting Arabic skills leads towards the creation of a pidgin. Indeed, this situation is a good example of language ideology and language attitude. It shows how host country ideology can affect language learning. Arya, McClung, & Scott (2016) investigate the by-country effects of officially recognized languages on reading performance for large populations of students whose primary language is not the dominant language. The results show that the attitudes of the speakers of the dominant official language predict reading performance, which is better when is the minority language valued.

Some speakers of GPA do not see themselves as a part of the culture, and in fact, see their own culture and language de-valued in the eyes of Saudi people they work for. This might have something to do with the lack of desire to further develop their Arabic. In addition, long hours and lack of opportunities/ access to take Arabic classes in their host countries should also be a factor.

Motivation for learning Arabic is a complex issue. Several questions arise: Do migrants speak Arabic? How conscious are the migrants of the difference between their own pidginized Arabic and the standard varieties of Arabic? Actually, Almoaily (2002) and Bizri (2014) give answers to these questions. Some of Almoaily's Asian interviewees replied *fi shwayyah Arabi* 'there is (i.e. I know) little Arabic', *hina Arabi nus* 'here Arabic half' (i.e. I know some Arabic). The clearest statement given by Almoaily in his data which shows that GPA speakers look at GA and GPA as one variety (i.e. Arabic) was when the informant said 'people here speak quickly'. This statement suggests that GPA speakers, at least in the case of this interviewee, conceive of GA as different from GPA only in terms of speed of delivery.

Thus, GPA is not very different from the language which locals speak (GA). As in the case of Bizri, (2014) where she conducted an interview in 2008 in Sri Lanka, with fourteen Sinhala women<sup>18</sup> to assess (in Sinhala) the scope of the Arabic language (its inter-dialectal differences, register, and stylistic differences), all her interviewees showed some kind of agreement on Arabic dialectal differences (which they often limit to lexical items<sup>19</sup>) across the Arab world. However, none of the interviewees considered their own pidginized Arabic Pidgin Madam (PM)<sup>20</sup> to be a non-standard form of Arabic. They rather showed their capacity to adopt specific dialectal features (mainly lexical) in each country.

A further question that should be raised here relating to the motivation of learning Arabic is whether all migrants have the same aspiration and desire to know Arabic. Is Arabic valued by all of them? It seems that religious values are a powerful motivator to the non-Arab Muslim migrant workers. They have either a particular sensitivity to Arabic or an additional motivation to improve their Arabic. Thangarajah (2003) discussed how Islamic religious practices play an empowering and progressive role in the life of Muslim Sri Lankan women working in the Gulf. He noticed that once those Muslim Sri Lankan migrants return home in Sri Lanka, they practice their acquired knowledge of the language of the Quran and their personal experience with Arab Muslims in order to enhance their social status prestige.

Næss (2008) also referred to how much Arabic matters in religion when she speaks of a Pakistani Muslim worker who has become more sensitive to both Arabic phonology and its lexicon because he is well versed in the Quran. (e.g. a GPA speaker would say *same-same* “together” < GA *ittiḥād* “unity” whereas this Pakistani Muslim had a sufficiently sophisticated vocabulary to choose GA *ithād* in his speech).

## Conclusion

This paper provided a description of both unity and diversity within GPA, a contact variety used for communication between Gulf Arabic speakers and Asian foreign workers in the GCC. It also aimed at examining the factors (both linguistic and sociolinguistic) responsible for unity and diversity within varieties. Hence, the current study makes a contribution to the

<sup>18</sup> Who had previously worked as maids in more than one Arabic country.

<sup>19</sup> A list of lexical couples (where the first part is in Lebanon Language (LA), and the second in GA) from (Bizri, 2014). These lexical couples are: *halla-aleyn* ‘now’, *masāre-pulūs* ‘money’, *dsēs-dyāy* ‘chicken’ *hēk-čida* ‘like this’.

<sup>20</sup> Pidgin Madam (PM) is a contact language spoken between Sinhala female domestic workers and their native Arabic employers in Lebanon (Bizri, 2009-2010).

field of less-described non-Indo European pidgins. It might provide useful data for researchers interested in the genesis of pidgins and creoles. The analysis of the available linguistic data of GPA revealed that its segmental phonology seems to comply with universal features of pidgins and creoles. It is reduced or simplified; i.e., some consonants are either lost or have undergone a shift from the lexifier GA. For instance, GPA speakers tend to replace uncommon phonemes like /ħ/, /ʻ/, and /ħ/ with the more common phonemes /h/, /ʻ/ and /k/. Also, the sounds /ṭ/, /ḍ/, and /f/ change into /t/, /d/, and /p/, respectively. Additionally, the vowels in GPA are reduced in most of the available data. Most GPA speakers display no distinction for length, which in turn automatically drops the long vowels and keeps the short ones. This feature is also attested in other Arabic-based pidgins (Avram, 1995; Miller, 2002; Næss, 2008; Owens 1989).

Mobility is the main value attributed to learning Standard Arabic (Bizri, 2014). Most migrant participants interviewed by researchers have lived and worked in several Arabic-speaking countries (Gulf Arabic and non-Gulf Arabic) prior to when they were recorded. Bizri (2014) refers to the Arabic language as “a passport ensuring employment in a vast job market, covering most of West Asia” (p. 406). Consequently, this mobility plays a significant role in achieving a relatively unified form of GPA.

In the case of GPA, native speakers tend to interact with migrant workers in the pidgin rather than the superstrate language (Almoaily, 2012). Here, native Arabic speakers have already adopted pidginized forms of Arabic in their FT, whatever pidginized variety migrants develop, so only what is recognized in native Arabic speakers' FT will be transmitted to newcomers. By doing so, they validate the pidginized system and totally impede further access to the superstrate.

In spite of their high degree of unity in both linguistic structure and social context, GPA varieties do show aspects of diversity. This diversity is attributed to differences between the individual linguistic and non- linguistic backgrounds in which migrants navigate. On the one hand, each individual Gulf Arabic country has a unique set of foreign substrate languages. For example, Saudi Arabia has very complex multilingual setting with a variable number of substrate languages each represented by sizeable speech community. On the other hand, within individual speech communities, there are distinct groups which are defined by typical features and a peculiar context for language acquisition determining what they have in their linguistic repertoire, which in turn determines the structure of the incipient variety. These groups are determined for example by participants' age and gender; the range of the Arabic



norm the migrants are exposed to; and the personal motivation of the migrants throughout the Gulf countries (Bizri, 2014).

The study of Arabic-lexified pidgins is relatively recent, and studies on the GPA variety are limited. In fact, the current study has been dedicated to particular areas of GPA and has largely ignored female workers. Therefore, I conclude this investigation with a set of recommendations for future research on this pidgin language:

1. This study is an armchair description of GPA. It would be fruitful to conduct data-based studies of GPA which rely on compiling a corpus of recorded spoken data.
2. The majority of the available data from the Gulf relates to the freelance male workers. Comparing the GPA production of male speakers with that of female speakers might reveal gender-variation in GPA. However, in order to do this, more female researchers are needed in this area in order to gain access to this population.
3. This study could help in teaching migrant workers the language of the host country, i.e. Arabic. The findings about the phonology used by migrant workers and the reasons of this, will help teachers to know how this should best be adopted to standard Arabic.

Even though many migrant workers can “get along” with GPA, learning Standard Arabic might give them certain advantages in society that could lead to upward mobility and life improvement.

It seems that it would be a good idea for the Saudi government to do more to create conditions in which workers are treated well and valued as people and introduces policies to give them access to language classes in Standard Arabic.

### **Biodata**

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2015 which is a part of Research Institute of Information and Language Processing (RIILP) as a full-time student. She did her Master's degree in Applied Linguistics at Al-Emam Mohammed Ibn Saud University, SA. She is interested in language as a social phenomenon and the way in which we use language to understand and shape the world we live in. A large part of her research focuses on non-Indo European language-based contact languages, particularly Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA), sociolinguistics, and corpus linguistics.





## Appendix A. Maps



Map 1: Arabian Gulf States (Source: Google Maps<sup>21</sup>).

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved 5/7/2016 from: <http://maps.google.com/>



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